

## THE JOSEPH A. SNOW FAMILY

- Written by J. Gerald Snow

Three generations of pioneer blood coursed deep in the veins of Joseph Atha Snow and those of his wife, Martha Lenora Stringam, their respective progenitors having pushed back frontiers of America from rocky New England on the eastern seaboard, New York State, South Carolina, Indiana, successively to Ohio, Missouri, Illinois then being eventually caught up in the epic western Mormon trek to the Great Salt Lake Valley of the Rocky Mountains.

Joseph, the fifth of ten children, was born to Willard Snow and Mary Melissa (Meeks) Snow October 6, 1886 in a small two-roomed log house in Central Utah at Bicknell, Wayne County. While Lenora, sixth of seven children, was born October 2, 1887 in the same small rural community 65 miles southeast of Richfield, to George Walter Stringam and Emily (Billings) Stringam. How the lives of these two intertwined and eventually melded as husband and wife is part of the story.

Joseph, or Jode as he was affectionately termed by his family and close associates in youth, but more commonly, Joe, in later life, matured rapidly under the stresses of the rigorous pioneer life of his childhood and by the age of nine had acquired a deep love for horses. Hiring out to a neighboring rancher when but eleven years old, his employer was amazed at his dexterity with horses.

Joseph loved the great outdoors, the round-ups and cattle drives, being happiest with a good horse between his legs and a rope in his hands. He was fond of telling stories of the Henry Mountains, particularly tales of roping steers as they darted in and out of the rocks, dodging box elders, quaking aspen and huge rocks as they ran. Here he lived a life as rugged and as colorful as the

rocky valleys which reared him.

While still in his teens, the lure of Western Canada quickened his pioneer blood. In answering to this urge he relates that he celebrated his 17th birthday in an immigrant rail car filled with settlers' effects enroute from his native Utah to that part of Canada that was later to become Alberta. When he got off the train at Stirling, Alberta in October, 1903 he stood 6'2" and weighed 126 lbs. which earned for him the nickname of "Slivers" by which he was known as he rode several cowboy round-ups for the McIntyre and Knight Ranches, in the routine duties of which employment he broke many bronchos and trailed cattle many miles.

However, wishing to acquire property of his own, Joseph joined the Great Homestead Movement then in progress in the newly created province of Alberta. This brought him and his brother, Willard, to Vulcan, Alberta where each filed on a homestead northwest of the present town site about 6 miles as the crow flies. Joseph staked his claim on the Northwest quarter Section 6, Township 18, Range 24, while Willard filed on the Southwest quarter of the same section. The cost to each - \$10.00. Joseph was later to remark that the government bet 160 acres of land against \$10.00 that the homesteaders could not "tough it out" long enough to make the necessary improvements, erect fences, break the virgin prairie and successfully conquer the wilderness. Many homesteaders however proved that they could do just that and, except for their successes, this book could not have been written.

Here the Snow brothers built a dug-out roofed over with grass, roots and sod turf where they lived until they could build a one-roomed shack. Their menu consisted of biscuits and bacon which they supplemented with items derived from income obtained by working for others in the district and during part of the year going back to the Milk River Ridge country to resume the cowboying trail again.

Joseph later acquired Willard's quarter section by purchase following which Willard moved to Section 9 of the same Township where he developed a three-quarter section farm which is still owned and operated by his sons.

In 1909 Joe now matured into an assured young man, journeyed to Utah for the first time since leaving there six years before. Here he resumed courtship of the sweetheart of his youth, Lenora Stringam, and they were subsequently married on the 6th of August, 1910. A short time later the newly married couple returned to Alberta to take up life together among their homestead neighbors in the fledgeling province of Alberta.

Prior to her marriage Lenora attended school at Bicknell, worked in the church where she played the piano and engaged in the normal activities of young women. After completing her training in local schools, she attended the Brigham Young Academy, now the Brigham Young University at Provo, Utah. There she majored in Home Economics, learning homemaking, cooking, sewing, all skills shaping her life for the future role she was to play as a pioneer wife and mother in a new land.

During the next few years life was earnest as the prairie sod was broken and brought under crop, a home and fences built and children born and reared.

During this period Joseph served as the Secretary-Treasurer of the Dairy Derby District School near his homestead holding and also took part in other community projects along with his neighbors as time permitted and circumstances required. Thoses were the green days when people initiated and organized their own activities, the social life and shared experiences of that period being often called to nostalgic memory in later years.

While Joseph was a homesteader and perforce a farmer, his first love was livestock and so it was only natural that he soon made plans to build up a small herd of cattle which he ranged on the Little Bow River near the present town of Champlon.

As a cattleman, Joseph Snow was excelled by no one. He was one of the few men who could wean calves from their mothers on the open range and drive them home before their mothers missed them. He remembered each cow individually just as most of us remember people. He could hind-foot rope a hundred calves for branding without a miss.

In fact, once when driving some cattle along his fence during a snow storm he saw a wildcat sitting on a post. He took down his lariat and roped the beast. The cat took two great leaps toward him but Joe spurred his horse ahead when he realized that he might have company in his saddle and dragged the animal to death. He later had the hide tanned and sewn into a fur cap which he wore for many years.

It was also said he could walk a herd of cattle twenty miles to market and have them weighing heavier when they arrived than when they left home. He admired sturdy, well trained horses and always rode a big one with plenty of timber.

Joseph was admired for his ability to stand the cold weather and could ride all day in below zero weather in his favorite double-breasted buckskin jacket, cowboy hat and scarf, a pair of leather gloves on his fingers and no overshoes over his boots. He said he tied his overshoes, mittens and fur hat behind his saddle "just in case" it got cold..

Joseph was known far and wide as a master story teller - an art greatly appreciated by all who knew him. Gesturing with both hands as he talked, he skillfully used detail and pause in building up suspense leading to the climax of the stories which always left his listeners asking for more.

Among these he recounted many incidents of stooking, threshing outfits and of hauling wheat thirty miles during the winter months from the homestead to High River with four horse teams and grain tanks, a return trip requiring two days to complete. He even admitted to, one day while he and a friend were burning weeds, accidentally starting a prairie fire which burned for three days across the country north of Vulcan destroying all the knee-high grass. When the police investigated several days later he was miles away. Joseph was a badly frightened man for the first time in his life and said he never dared to light more than the kitchen stove after this experience.

Another story he often related was an account of an experience at the Calgary Stockyards when stocking his Little Bow River ranch. It seems he was taken to a pen of stock cows by one of the commission men at the yards. These did not suit his fancy and he turned them down. Subsequent to this the same cattle were shown him successively by other salesmen thinking perhaps that he would not know the difference and would not realize he was being shown the same animals. Finally, in exasperation he turned to the commission agent of the moment and peeling back the lid of one eye, laconically remarked to him, 'What's the matter - do you see some green in my eye?'

In late 1918 the Joseph Snows sold out their Vulcan holdings and moved to Raymond, at the same time acquiring three and one half sections of grassland west of Warner. Raymond was the family home until 1934 when a move was made to Milk River where a



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ranch had been acquired in 1925 west of that town. During this interval Joseph continued his stockman vocation, built roads under contract for the Sugar City Municipality, experienced and survived three serious livestock crises, though not without serious economic reverses, and weathered the dirty thirties during which period he never lost faith in the country saying, "Someday it will start to rain again."

Following a period in a Lethbridge hospital subsequent to a cerebral hemorrhage, Joseph Atha Snow, he who to a marked degree possessed the common touch and who throughout an active life respected his fellows for what they were, not for their title, position or wealth, passed over the Great Divide, April 14, 1942, to that range from which no rider has returned.

His widow, Martha Lenora (Stringam) subsequently moved from Milk River to Lethbridge in 1949, where she resided until April 30, 1968, when in death she joined her husband.

This pioneer husband and wife couple brought nine children into the world, five of them born prior to moving from the Vulcan homestead and the other four in subsequent years. In order of birth they are as follows.

Joseph Gerald, born January 2nd., 1912. He married Lisbeth Gehmlich April 21st., 1934. They have three children - Geraldine, Marilyn and Peggy-Ann to whom have been born twelve children. Since 1935 Gerald has been identified with the fortunes of the sugar beet industry in the irrigated section of Southern Alberta where he is now Agricultural Superintendent for Canadian Sugar Factories Ltd., having supervisory responsibility for 42,000 acres of contract sugar beet production annually. He resides in Lethbridge.